

DEFEND THE ATLANTA FOREST

an autonomous movement for the future of South Atlanta

[HOME](#) [SOLIDARITY](#) [LIBRARY](#) [CALENDAR](#) [MEDIA KIT](#) [BLOG](#) [FAQ](#)

Frequently Asked Questions

What is Defend the Forest/Stop Cop City?

Defend the Forest & Stop Cop City is a grassroots movement of many groups and individuals from Atlanta and beyond, working together and separately to prevent the forest off Key, Fayetteville, Constitution, and Bouldercrest roads from becoming either a police training compound or a new Hollywood soundstage complex.

This website is a media clearinghouse for sharing news, perspectives, and updates from the on-the-ground movement. We do not organize protests, actions, or events.

At once a movement, slogan, and media platform, Defend the Forest is a fight for the future of Atlanta. As a movement, Defend the Forest is a dynamic and diverse collection of grassroots groups and individuals dedicated to fighting the creeping dystopia of police militarization and ecological ruin. As a slogan, "Defend the Forest" is a declaration of opposition to the destruction of the South River/Weelaunee Forest and the construction of both the Cop City training compound and Blackhall Studios's Soundstage Complex. While the movement is decentralized and has no official leadership or spokespeople, this website is a media platform for sharing important information, news, actions, and events. This site does not speak for the movement as a whole, but media requests concerning Defend the Forest can be routed through this website.

Stop Cop City is also a slogan, a media platform, and a movement. Stop Cop City as a movement is also comprised of multiple organizations and groups, sometimes referring to themselves as the "Stop Cop City Coalition." Information about the Stop Cop City Coalition is available at stopcop.city.

On the ground, most people use the phrases "defend the forest" and "stop cop city" more or less interchangeably to refer to the abundance of forces and efforts working in tandem to oppose the destruction of the South River/Weelaunee Forest and the construction of the Cop City training compound.

How can I help?

There are many ways to get involved. You can support online, help organize your community, show up for actions, or any other number of activities depending on your availability and comfort level. The movement appreciates the need for diverse tactics, meaning many forms of struggle that move towards a common goal. Here's some more ideas:

- You can sign up for sporadic text alerts here: 470.606.1212
- You can Visit the forest at 3251 W Side Place, Atlanta GA 30316.
- You can [donate to on-the-ground forest defense and community groups](#).
- You can donate to [legal & bail support fund](#) for protestors.
- You can donate to the [lawsuit challenging the Dekalb County movie studio land swap](#).
- You can organize protests, send phone calls or emails, or help with direct actions of different kinds to encourage contractors of the various projects to stop the destruction. You can find some of the contractors here: stopreevesyoung.com
- Call Brasfield & Gorrie (678.581.6400), the Atlanta Police Foundation (770.354.3392), and the City of Atlanta (404.330.6100) and ask them to cancel the project and to remain peaceful with tree-sitters and other on-the-ground protesters.
- You can form an Action Group in your community, neighborhood, town, city, college, or scene. Together, you can host information nights, movie screenings, potluck dinners, and protests at the offices of

contractors, at the homes of the board members, on campus, or elsewhere. You can post and pass out fliers at public places and shows, knock on doors to talk to neighbors and sign them up for text alerts, fundraisers, or actions, or you can innovate new activities altogether.

- You can conduct independent research about the destruction of the forest, construction projects, their funders, their contractors, or lesser-known details about the project using public records searches or other open source investigation techniques and send your findings to us at [defendtheatlantaforest\[at\]protonmail\[dot\]com](mailto:defendtheatlantaforest[at]protonmail[dot]com).
- You can organize to join or create a camp in the South River/Weelaunee Forest. Respect people's space and try to be friendly.
- Finally, you and friends or your group could organize to caravan down to the forest from near or far during weeks of action.

What is Cop City?

- A military-style training compound
- Mock city for police to practice urban warfare, crowd control, raids on apartments, etc.
- Black Hawk landing pad
- Large capacity shooting ranges for machine guns and heavy weaponry
- Bomb testing site
- Potentially a new jail of some sort (data inconsistent and vague on this point)

Cop City is a proposed \$90 million+, state-of-the-art police training compound backed by the Atlanta Police Foundation and its corporate patrons like Cox, Coca-Cola, Delta, the Koch brothers, and Home Depot, to name just a few. Located on 381 acres of land, Cop City will be the largest police training facility in the United States and is slated to include a mock city where police will train with firearms, tear gas, helicopters, and explosive devices for protest and mass unrest like the 2020 George Floyd protests. Cop City will *hyper-militarize* law enforcement, equipping police with a site to train for the suppression of Atlanta's diverse Black and working-class communities.

Slated to be twice the size of already oversized police training facilities in New York and Los Angeles, Cop City, if completed, will serve as a national model of police militarization and budgetary bloat. Notably, this facility is supposed to be built on the site of a Jim Crow-era forced labor camp (the Old Atlanta Prison Farm), which was itself built upon a 19th century slave plantation. The project would destroy precious forest, which Atlanta needs in order to mitigate the effects of climate change, and would sit on the unmarked graves of our enslaved and shackled ancestors.

This section of the city is already home to a juvenile detention facility and women's prison. We do not believe these facilities keep our communities safe, and we do not want more facilities like them

What is the Blackhall/Shadowbox Studios Soundstage Complex?

Blackhall Studios is a film production studio owned by an LA-base private equity firm, Commonwealth Group. Due to a massive corporate buy-out and bad publicity, Blackhall has just been rebranded as Shadowbox Studios, but has not changed its plan to threaten the forest or its dependence on public subsidies. Blackhall currently operates a soundstage complex on Constitution Road in southeast Atlanta, and hoping to expand operations, their Chairman/CEO Ryan Millsap acquired 55 acres of forest on Bouldercrest Road in 2017. Upon completion of the purchase, the movie company realized that flooding and grading problems make the land unsuitable for their proposed use: to build the largest soundstage complex on Earth.

Dekalb County has happily handed over public resources to serve this end, offering massive tax incentives, and giving Blackhall a large portion of Intrenchment Creek Park, a public county park heavily used by cyclists and other residents. This park is a part of the same exact forest as the Old Atlanta Prison Farm, slated to become Cop City — the parcels are adjoined by Intrenchment Creek. Dekalb County Commissioners has announced they plan to bulldoze nearby historic Thomasville Cemetery in an adjacent neighborhood to build an \$5 million intersection designed specifically for semi-trucks in order to service Blackhall Studios.

What is the relationship between Blackhall/Shadowbox Studios and gentrification?

In addition to inaugurating a massive wave of deforestation and movie industry-induced gentrification in southwest Dekalb, this development would set a terrible precedent of allowing public officials to give away public lands to private corporations. An ongoing lawsuit organized by Stop the Swap, from the South River Watershed Alliance, and the South River Forest Coalition challenges the Dekalb-Blackhall land swap on this basis.

If this project goes through, nothing stops government officials from surrendering larger and larger pieces of infrastructure or land to real estate companies, movie studios, or other corporate developers.

Atlanta is now consistently in the top 3 most unequal cities in the United States, and faces unique forms of displacement of its low-income Black residents. Selling off public assets to developers and corporations has been a key cause of this gentrification, especially since the 1996 Olympic Games, which provided cover for city politicians to displace thousands of low income ATLians for the sake of international notoriety. We cannot allow politicians to sell-off every inch of free space.

Attracted by lower rents, production costs, and wages than heavily unionized and centralized production cities such as Los Angeles and New York City, more and more production companies have been digging into the Atlanta metropolitan area since the early 2000s. The beneficiaries of this "New Hollywood" seek to emphasize the creation of jobs for ATL, but the reality is that the highest-paid workers are industry specialists moving in from production hubs like New York, Chicago and Los Angeles, displacing local working-class residents. What we are left with is rents raising up to \$200/year or more, 400 evictions processed each month (third highest nationwide) and an ever-increasing percentage of lower-income neighborhoods in Atlanta at risk of gentrification.

This is an outrage. How can this be happening?

- The Atlanta City Council voted 11-4 for building Cop City after playing 17 hours of community comment which was overwhelmingly against constructing Cop City. The Atlanta City Council is more beholden to the Atlanta Police Foundation and the Foundation's financial backers, which include Bank of America, AT&T, and Arthur Blank, than they are to the ordinary residents of Atlanta.
- Cop City is an example of "The Atlanta Way," a form of backroom dealing between the mostly white business class and the predominantly Black city politicians that ignores the input of everyday Atlanta residents. This arrangement of social control has existed since the 1960s and continues to this day. The main culprit of this corruption scheme today is the Atlanta Committee for Progress (atlprogress.org).
- In 2020, thousands of people in Atlanta along with over 20 million nationwide rose up against the murder of George Floyd, and many in that uprising called for a scaling back of police budgets. In Atlanta, this mass, grassroots movement was ignored by City Council, who instead significantly increased the Atlanta Police Department's budget.
- Dekalb County has initiated a process of swapping the clear-cut land parcel owned by Blackhall Studios for the currently-existing public park and forest known as Intrenchment Creek Park. Local residents are opposed to this, and ecologists from the region have already illustrated how removing this forest and wetland will contribute immensely to flooding in the entire zone of the city.

Who is responsible for these projects?

- The Atlanta Police Foundation wants to build Cop City. They have the support of Davinci Development Collaborative for project management, Eberley & Associates for engineering, LS3P as architects, and Brasfield & Gorrie for general contracting, who is supported by Long Engineering (and their parent company, Atlas Technical Consultants), and many other funders and backers. More info can be found at stopreevesyoung.com.

- Commonwealth Group is behind the Shadowbox Studios soundstage complex, formerly known as Blackhall Studios. They are supported by Atlas Technical Consultants, and many other as-yet identified contractors and backers.

Who can stop this? What have elected officials done?

Only grassroots resistance and popular mobilization can stop this. Elected officials in the City of Atlanta have thrown their weight behind the project, despite public outcry. Dekalb County Commissioner Ted Terry is opposed to the developments, but does not have authority to stop the Cop City project, because it is on property owned by the Atlanta Police.

What has been done so far to try to stop these projects?

There are numerous ongoing campaigns to defend and restore the South River Forest, and to prevent construction of Cop City. To date, people have called in to city council meetings, filed petitions and lawsuits, voted against city councilpersons who support the projects, marched, hosted rallies and educational events, vandalized property of the Police Foundation as well as contractors, engaged in nonviolent civil disobedience including in the form of “tree-sits”, hosted forest tours and educational events, rallied near the homes of politicians and business executives in order to ask them to reconsider their decisions or projects, and disabled or otherwise nonviolently sabotaged construction equipment, as well as building encampments inside of the forest itself.

Is this movement violent?

When authorities feel threatened, they always claim to “fear for their lives.” Controlling public opinion and legislation allows the government to decry every form of effective resistance, from sit-ins, to strikes, to interruptions, to encampments, and beyond as a form of “violence.” We prefer to cut straight to the chase: no one has been harmed by participants in this movement. Police, though, have beaten protesters, jailed passive resisters, and pointed guns at unarmed tree-sitters. Rather than get distracted by old tactical debates between violent and nonviolent methods, between legal or grassroots resistance, or between direct or symbolic action, Defend the Forest/Stop Cop City has grown by embracing a much simpler and more intuitive framework: defense and offense. Defensive strategies involve petitions to stop work, on the ground blockading and resistance, legal aid, jail support, and more. The offensive strategies involve call-in campaigns, public pressure work, office visits, at-home protests of contractors, and more. Whatever slows the destruction and protects the movement from harm is the defense. Whatever allows creative people to prioritize their own activity, leading to the ultimate abandonment of the project, is the offense.

The chief benefit of this framework is that it allows protesters to focus on the strategies and approaches that feel safe, dignified, and comfortable for them, all pushing together despite some differences of opinion or outlook.

“We climb the same mountain, but we walk our own ways.”

Is this movement anti-police?

The movement is anti-harm. Cop City and Blackhall Studios plan to harm the forest. The forest's destruction will harm surrounding neighborhoods and the whole city. Police disproportionately harm and imprison Black people and people of color, and building a training facility for urban warfare will only escalate this structural commitment to racist harm.

On the heels of the historic 2020 uprising following the murder of George Floyd by the Minneapolis Police Department, the current movement inherits all of the wisdom and ingenuity of those unforgettable days. After millions marched, demonstrated, and took action against police brutality, the Atlanta government and countless others found creative ways to give local law enforcement even more resources and funds, under the cover of “reform” and “trainings.” We do not forget that Garrett Rolfe, who killed Rayshard Brooks for sleeping in his car right here in Atlanta on University Avenue, also underwent many hours of “sensitivity

trainings” and “de-escalation” courses. Unequal societies can only be preserved with violence and intimidation. We can understand how residents and community members on the receiving end of this violence and intimidation would be opposed to the forces hoping to increase it.

Is this an environmental/ecological movement?

The movement is made of up people and groups of diverse views, but it is largely motivated by the shared perception that ecological destruction constitutes a grave threat to life on Earth, that it disproportionately affects disadvantaged groups such as Atlanta’s Black communities, and that rather than investing in solutions to the environmental crisis, governments are investing in heavier policing, especially of those disadvantaged groups. Atlanta’s tree canopy is one of its main sources of resiliency in the face of climate change. The threatened forest is home to wetlands that filter rainwater and prevent flooding which is a growing issue in the city. It is also one of the last breeding grounds for many amphibians in the region and an important migration site for wading birds. Nevertheless, the police and Blackhall studios are set to bulldoze every inch of it.

The period of planetary climate collapse that we are all living in will continue to pose urgent and unsettling questions to our species as we fight for dignity in a world of increasingly dangerous wildfires, floods, hurricanes, earthquakes, and mass extinction. Rather than address the problems as they really present themselves, world and local leaders are hurling us into the fire. As we fight for a life worth living, the system seems prepared to prop up its petroleum-based economy with tear gas and lines of riot police. Defend the Forest/Stop Cop City is one part of a larger struggle dedicated to opening up a different path forward.

I am a reporter, who can I contact for media inquiries?

Email defendtheatlantaforest@protonmail.com and check out the [Media Kit](#).

